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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004214

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/11/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PNAT](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MAJOR SUNNI PARTY PARTICIPATES IN GATHERING IN
SUPPORT OF CONSTITUTION

REF: KIRKUK 218

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford.
Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) Summary. The Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) reiterated support for the amended draft constitution at a big tent gathering of Iraqi political leaders October 12 in the Transitional National Assembly. A number of important amendments, negotiated in the last week, paved the way for the statement of IIP support. The amendments (septel) addressed many Sunni concerns about Arab unity and identity and most importantly, created a commission that would propose changes to the constitution four months after the election of the National Assembly. The amendments were read into the record to the assembled TNA members. The event, billed as an evening of national consensus and reconciliation brought together national leaders including President Talabani, PM Jafari, Kurdish region President Barzani, former PM Allawi, Speaker Hachem al-Hasani, Vice President Ghazi al-Yawar and many others. Reaction to the IIP and other Sunni support for the Constitution was swift with a bombing of the IIP office in Falluja and fistfights breaking out in National Dialogue party meetings to discuss the changes. With at least some of the major Sunni leaders publicly supporting the constitution, its chances for passage in the October 15 referendum increase. End summary.

2. (U) Many of Iraq's major political players convened on the evening of October 12 at the Transitional National Assembly in Baghdad to witness the reading of amendments to the draft Constitution and to offer statements of support. Joining National Assembly Speaker al-Hasani on the stage were President Jalal Talabani, Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari, Kurdistan Regional Government President Masud Barzani, SCIRI leader Abd' al-Aziz al-Hakim, and Former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. In addition to Hasani, Sunni Arabs on the dais included Deputy President Ghazi al-Yawar, Deputy Prime Minister Abd al-Mutlak al-Juburi, Defense Minister Sadoun Duleimi and Minister of State for Women's Affairs Dr. Azhar Shaykhli, Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) Representative Nasir Al-Ani, Republican Group leader Saad al-Janabi, Independent Democrats leader Adnan Pachachi, National Democratic Party leader Nasir Chaderchi. A large number of TNA members were present in the auditorium along with a number of diplomatic representatives including the U.S., U.K., Japanese, Russian, Australian, and other Ambassadors.

3. (U) After Speaker Hasani had the amendments read into the record, the top leaders made brief statements of support for the draft constitution. President Talabani called Iraq's draft Constitution one of the best in the region and said it represented a national consensus, or semi-consensus. Continuing the theme, PM Jafari called it a day of national reconciliation and pointed out that the constitution can be changed. SCIRI leader Abd' al-Aziz al-Hakim said that the constitution signals the end of 30 years of tyranny and is one of the greatest achievements of the government. Former PM Allawi called the agreement a landmark of political unity. IIP representative Al-Ani noted that IIP was not alone in the two days of negotiations that led to the compromise agreement on the amendments. The IIP, he said, coordinated for all those who did not participate in the past - alluding to the Sunni groups that boycotted the January TNA elections. He called the draft constitution a great achievement.

SCIRI's Hakim Presents Vision

4. (SBU) SCIRI leader Hakim focused his remarks on federalism, hinting at future political aspirations of his party. He stated that Iraq must be a federal Iraq, an Iraq of regions. He said that any governorate may become a region and have all the authorities of any other region.

Islamic Party Steady

15. (C) Tarik al-Hashimi, Secretary General of the IIP Tarik Hashimi begged off at the last moment stating he was "tired." IIP spokesman and de-facto deputy leader Ayed Samarra'i'e told PolCouns that Hashimi was under tremendous pressure within the IIP since the party was completely changing its position on the constitution. PolCouns called on Hashimi October 13 to offer assistance on security-related issues. Hashimi showed PolCouns an angry communication from the IIP office in Basrah complaining that the party's supporters could not understand the sudden change on the constitution. Hashimi and Samarra'i'e said they would try to get more air time on satellite TV to explain the IIP's position. (COMMENT: It was a significant achievement to have the IIP representative present. Al-Hashimi himself privately told us that he felt unable to go due to continued discontent within his party over the IIP's public endorsement of the constitution deal. While the Basrah office was unhappy, the Diyala IIP office appears to welcome the IIP change in position - see ref.)

16. (C) The internal debate about the constitution is causing serious internal divisions within the Sunni groups. Local news reports say that the Sunni Waqf has announced its support of the draft constitution, as Waqf leader Shaykh Ahmed Abdelghafur Samarra'i'e had promised PolCouns October 12. Hashimi said on October 13 he would follow up PolCouns' suggestion that instructions for the Friday sermons be issued from the Waqf. Meanwhile, a Dialog Council member told PolFSN October 12 afternoon that as the Council thrashed out its position for or against the draft constitution, fistfights broke out. Dialog Council member Shaykh Abdelnasir al-Janabi complained bitterly to PolCouns October 12 that they had not been consulted during the latest negotiations. PolCouns rejoined that Janabi could have been in contact with the IIP or other negotiators; the Council needed to work with Iraqis and not depend on the U.S. Embassy. By contrast, Dialog Council member Mahmud Mashadani has been supportive of the draft constitution in western press statements. (He said he would not speak to the Arab media, however.)

Insurgency Reaction

16. (C) Sunni leader support for the Constitution is not without its consequences. Hours after the TNA session announcing the breakthrough, we received reports that IIP leader Hashimi's office in Falluja was bombed. The Victorious Army insurgent group released an internet statement calling for war on the IIP for approving the "infidel" constitution. It singled out IIP leaders Hashimi and Mushin Abd' al-Hamid for death. Hashimi on October 13 showed us a threatening letter from the "Mansur Sect Army" promising "war" on the Islamic Party. (He said the Mansur Sect Army is concentrated in the Jihad district of Baghdad.) The Najaf office of former PM Ayad Allawi was also reportedly bombed overnight. Speaker Hasani, fearing for his life, has asked MNF-I to provide PSD support for his travel around Baghdad. Khalilzad